

Park, J. P.: *Art by the Book: Painting Manuals and the Leisure Life in Late Ming China*. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2012, xiii + 309 pp., + 16 color plates, ISBN 978-0-295-99176-4.

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Painting manuals (*huapu* 畫譜) form a special genre of printed books in premodern China. These easily understandable texts and illustrations explain the basic painting techniques of brushwork and composition with a step-by-step approach. Although they first appeared in the Song dynasty (960–1276), painting manuals became particularly popular from the late Ming (1368–1644) onwards, a flourishing period of economic growth, urbanization, art market, and woodblock printing. In *Art by the Book: Painting Manuals and the Leisure Life in Late Ming China*, J. P. Parks aims at unravelling the complex link between the proliferation of painting manuals and the peculiar socio-economic conditions and contemporary trends in commodity culture, literary culture, and artistic fashion. By examining the production and consumption of selected painting manuals printed between 1570 and 1620, Park offers a meticulously researched study of the content and function of these works. For him, these painting manuals are “the fields of play wherein artistic discourse meets social history” (p. 29) and are thus visual evidence of the changing cultural and social landscape of this period.

The five core chapters focusing mainly on two manuals compiled by Zhou Lüjing 周履靖 (1542–1633), the *Forest of Paintings* (*Huilin* 繪林) and the *Grove of Paintings* (*Huasou* 畫藪), are bracketed by an introduction, a coda, two appendices on lost and transmitted editions of late Ming painting manuals, and a glossary. After tracing the history of painting manuals and charting their evolution and popularity since the tenth century in Chapter 1, Park devotes the rest of the book to a detailed study of Zhou’s two manuals. Each of the four chapters pays attention to a painterly subject explicated in the two works, namely landscape illustrations, portraits and renderings of male figures, images of women, and, eventually, birds, plants, and flowers. Chapter two examines the landscape paintings in the first volume of Zhou’s *Grove of Paintings* and six engravings of landscape scenes in the *Forest of Paintings*. Highlighting the “fabricated text” and the complicated aesthetic and conceptual relationship between “word” and “image”, Park notes that Zhou borrowed and reorganized a sample of well-known historical painting treatises to present landscape painting as an artifact of elite culture. In Chapter 3 Park explores figural depictions of drinking gatherings and other leisure activities of scholars. Many hold accessories characteristic

of Wei-Jin 魏晉 (220–589) period hermits and thus clearly reflect traditional symbolism and iconography. At the same time, the author presents clear evidence that these images also express popular manners of the late Ming. In Chapter 4 Park moves onward to focus on how the four images of women in the *Grove of Paintings* can be taken to illustrate the social roles and the negotiated presence of women in late Ming society. Observing that in these illustrations women are involved in highly stereotyped activities found in traditional and contemporary Chinese poetry and literature, such as “pounding clothes” and “taming a parrot”, Park argues that although some women actively questioned prescribed gender boundaries through writing and painting, the images together reinforce the subordinate role of women. In the final chapter Park turns to the question of how standardized images of bamboo, plum, orchid, and bird-and-flower were taught and then personalized through their compositional arrangement.

Except for individual studies of the *Ten Bamboo Studio Manual of Calligraphy and Painting* (*Shizhuzhai shuhuapu* 十竹齋書畫譜) and the *Mustard Seed Garden Manual of Painting* (*Jieziyuan huazhuan* 芥子園畫傳), to date there are only few detailed studies of painting manuals in English, thus Park’s book is a welcome addition to the literature. Thanks to this study, the beautifully printed painting manuals by the rather unknown scholar Zhou Lüjing has now become accessible to a much broader readership. But the value of this book is far beyond introducing some primary sources. In particular, Park succeeds in contextualizing the role of painting manuals in the literati art world by answering why these manuals became extremely popular in the late Ming. As the industry of woodblock printing boomed in the late sixteenth century, the price of the printed painting manuals decreased and thus made them affordable to a new urban public created by the economic development and increased urbanization. Such publications tried to accommodate the cultural tastes and aspirations of the new urban elite of the time and they were produced in large quantity to furnish their readers with a feasible device for enhancing cultural capital. As Park cogently argues, because “painting was projected as a form of cultural capital by the reading public as well as an acknowledged skill that was rightfully part of leisure life” (p. 83), these painting manuals provided “a fast track to literati culture and skills” (p. 66). At the same time, as the painting manuals became more abundant and therefore “facilitated the public’s understanding of the secrets of art and democratized access to what had been the culture of the privileged few” (p. 214), the scholarly elite refuted the standardized “literati taste” achieved by the manuals, trying to authenticate their status by emphasizing the aesthetic values of “individuality” and “originality” (*qi* 奇) in painting. These manuals thus offer valuable insights into the paradigm shift in the landscape of literati art and the changes in taste-making mechanisms of different social groups in the late Ming.

Despite this nuanced study of the socio-historical significance of the textual and visual components of painting manuals in the late Ming, a number of interesting areas concerning the manuals' relation to the print culture of the time remain to be fully explored. First, since many of the images presented in the painting manuals also appear in other commercial publications, such as the daily-use encyclopedia *Xinke tianxia simin bianlan Santai wanyong zhengzong* 新刻天下四民便覽三台萬用正宗 (*Santai's Orthodox Instructions for Myriad Uses for the Convenient Perusal of all the People in the World, Newly Engraved*) published in Jianyang in 1599, one wonders what are the differences in publishing strategies adopted for publications of different genres? The preface of this work declares that it was "meant for the practical use and convenience of all people".¹ Thus it may be asked whether the painting manuals contained in such publications were consumed and used by members of the new urban elite or whether they did actually target at the non-elite readership? Second, although women and their representations are briefly mentioned in chapters 4 and 5, no particular consideration is given to examine their status, reading habits, and impact on the production and consumption of the manuals. As Dorothy Ko has persuasively shown in her study of educated elite women in seventeenth-century China, many women were actively involved in the flourishing printing industry since the late Ming and their engagement had exerted considerable influence on the publishing activities, and vice versa.² Is it possible to tease out the particular impact of gender on the production and consumption of the manuals? What are the reception and use of the manuals for women and how much do they differentiate from that of male viewers? Third, Zhou's manuals contain a large number of allographic writings dedicated to him by contemporary members of the elite. They are representative of many late Ming publications, which contain an increased amount of paratexts such as prefaces, reviews, and endorsements. How do these paratexts reveal the social relations of the publisher? What role do they play in creating and sharing collective cultural capital? Certainly, Park himself is also aware of these potential areas of future research and he has already taken the first step when he studies the dedicatory writings in the *Liu Xuehu's Plum Painting Manual* (*Liu Xuehu meipu* 劉雪湖梅譜) and the diverse social networks they manifest.³

In sum, *Art by the Book* does a great service to enhance our knowledge and understanding of painting manuals printed in the late Ming and their significance as visual evidence of the changing cultural and social landscape of the

1 On this work, see Chia 2002: 237–238.

2 See Ko 1994: ch. 1.

3 Park 2015.

period. The book is well-researched and eloquently written, and the joy to read is enriched by the extensive use of high-quality illustrations (117 in total, of which 16 in color) reproduced in the book. It is warmly recommended for readers interested in Ming cultural and social history, print and book culture, as well as visual culture.

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